

Testimony before Appropriations Committee regarding Funding the Eastern Regional Tourism
District in FY '12 and '13

February 24, 2011

Senator Harp Representative Walker
Members of the Appropriations Committee

My name is Joyce Olsen Resnikoff and I am the owner of Olde Mistik Village in Mystic and the Vice Chair of the Greater Mystic Visitors Bureau, the private sector arm of the Eastern Regional Tourism District.

I am here today to testify on my own behalf but also on behalf of Steve Coan CEO at the Mystic Aquarium, Tricia Cunningham Executive Director of the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce, Joan Esneault Vice President Foxwoods, Nanci Keenan General Manager of Groton Inn and Suites, John Markowicz Executive Director of SeCTer and Vice Chair of the Eastern Regional Tourism District, Chuck Moran Past President of the Connecticut Lodging Association, Mike Riegel Executive Director of the Submarine Force Museum, Donna Simpson, and Steve White CEO of Mystic Seaport Museum, to encourage you to support and fund the Eastern Regional Tourism District known as "Mystic Country".

Tourism in Eastern Connecticut is extremely important to our economic base. It employs thousands of Connecticut residents, contributes billions to the economic base, provides millions of state and local tax dollars and represents the excellent quality of life that is so important to the overall image of the state. Tourism businesses are here to stay - they don't move out of state - but to survive they must compete for visitors. We compete with every other destination to attract the same people to their non-Connecticut destinations. Make no mistake-the competition to attract visitors is fierce and important to many bottom lines.

It is precisely for this reason that support for tourism marketing at the statewide and regional level is so important. The last five years have been difficult but in the Eastern District we have worked hard to address the need for marketing. We have brought together the publicly funded Eastern Regional Tourism District with the private sector to form the Greater Mystic Visitors Bureau as a permanent Committee of the District. Through this partnership we have leveraged over \$500,000 in private funding to supplement public funds which last year resulted in:

- The only paid media campaign promoting Connecticut as a destination
- Created a world class website Mystic.org that combined the best elements of the previous public and private marketing initiatives and now updates information on a daily basis that consumers use to make decisions on choosing a destination.
- Negotiated an agreement with the New London Day, Mystic Chamber of Commerce and the Eastern Chamber of Commerce to produce the "Mystic Country Magazine" as a cooperative destination guide at no cost to the District and to be used by the three organizations thereby eliminating duplicate publications.

There are other accomplishments that I will not go into here but are attached to my written submission and I encourage you to look at.

Today I am here to ask you to continue to fund the Eastern Regional Tourism District. Under the current budget proposal the Eastern Regional Tourism District along with the Greater Mystic Visitors Bureau will cease to exist on July first in favor of a totally centralized tourism organization. We developed a public/private model and tested it. It works. It attracts private funds and can be used elsewhere. If you invite people they do come and we stand ready to work with you to continue our success in providing jobs and economic growth. To do so we need your help in funding the public side of the Eastern Regional Tourism District/Greater Mystic Visitors Bureau model.
Thank you.

Eastern Regional Tourism District/Greater Mystic Visitors Bureau Accomplishments and Outlook

In 2010 the tourism industry in Eastern Connecticut brought together the publicly funded Eastern Regional Tourism District and the industry, in the form of the Greater Mystic Visitors Bureau, to form a partnership.

In the past year alone we have achieved significant accomplishments. We have:

- Agreed to promote the entire region using the internationally recognized brand of "Mystic".
- Leveraged public funds with over \$508,000 of private funding nearly doubling our budget and funding the only paid media campaign-promoting Connecticut as a tourism destination.
- Created a "World Class" website www.Mystic.org combining the best elements of previous public and private marketing initiatives.
- Attracted over 75 businesses and organizations to contribute financially through the GMVB to District marketing efforts.
- Developed and executed a targeted marketing plan for the 2010 spring through summer and autumn seasons.
- Developed and introduced multiple seasonal consumer oriented promotions to encourage visitation.
- Negotiated an agreement with the New London Day/Mystic Chamber of Commerce/Eastern Chamber of Commerce to produce the "Mystic Country Magazine" as a cooperative destination guide to be used by the three organizations thereby eliminating duplicate publications.
- Negotiated an agreement with the Hall Radio Group for their 6 radio stations to become "The Voice of Mystic Country" in eastern Connecticut at no cost to the District but with a value of over \$400,000.
- Reached an agreement with the State Office of Tourism to fulfill all inquiries they receive with additional information about Connecticut, since they were unable to do so.
- Partnered with the Western and Central Tourism Districts to represent the entire state at tourism trade shows under the banner of "Connecticut Regions".

In addition to these achievements our plans for 2011 are to:

- Introduce a new direct booking engine on www.Mystic.org whereby consumers can directly book hotel accommodations and attraction tickets.
- With the other 2 Districts and the State coordinate marketing efforts to "Groups and Meetings" to re-establish Connecticut as a desired location for this lucrative segment of the tourism business.
- Expand the presence of Mystic Country via Social Media introducing "Weddings" information, Seasonal themes and interactive events and development of thematic trails to encourage exploration and visitation.

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